

NEWS RELEASE

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Carol A. Murray, Commissioner

For Immediate Release

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ISSUES BALD EAGLE OPINION
PROPOSED MERRIMACK RIVER BRIDGE “NOT LIKELY TO
JEOPARDIZE THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE BALD EAGLE”

In response to the Manchester Airport Access Road Bald Eagle Biological Assessment submitted jointly in August 2001 by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) has issued its Biological Opinion that “the project as proposed,...is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the bald eagle.”

The opinion is based on the fact that only one nesting pair occurs within the action area and 290+ pairs occur nearby in other northeastern states. More than 2,500 pairs of nesting eagles are known to exist in the northern United States.

The NHDOT estimates it will take up to 30 months to construct the Merrimack River Bridge between Bedford and Manchester. The NHDOT has agreed to the condition that no construction will occur in the identified buffer zone around the eagle nest between January 1 and June 15 during the first construction season for the bridge.

USF&WS believes “reproduction by the Bedford pair may be lost for one or possibly two breeding seasons, but that loss will not affect either local (New England-wide) or regional recovery trends.”

The USF&WS also recognized there would be loss of wintering habitat due to construction, however, “...the Service anticipates that most of the action area will not be directly affected by the proposed action and will continue to provide habitat for wintering eagles.”

The USF&WS concluded “that the limited effects on reproduction, number and distribution of the species are not expected, directly or indirectly, to reduce appreciably the likelihood of the survival and recovery of the bald eagle in the wild.” Put another way, the USF&WS has determined that while the project may adversely affect individual eagles and some habitat, it will not result in any effect at the population level.

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The following terms and conditions designated in the opinion are required to be implemented in order for the NHDOT to construct the Manchester Airport Access road at the selected location:

1. Clearing of forest or other vegetation within 660 feet of the Bedford nest tree is prohibited.
2. Construction activities within a certain area in proximity to the eagle nest are prohibited between January 1 and June 15 of the first construction season of the river bridge.
3. Bald Eagle activity within ½ mile of the river crossing will be monitored throughout the duration of construction.
4. Two alternative nests will be constructed with project funds at sites within the project's eagle study area. Both nests shall be constructed prior to the start of bridge construction.
5. Parcels of undeveloped land stretching approximately 1 mile along the Merrimack River in Bedford-Merrimack and Manchester will be acquired to preserve eagle habitat. Acquisition of lands to occur prior to start of construction.
6. A conservation/Management plan will be developed encompassing the Merrimack River corridor from northern Manchester to Reeds Ferry in Merrimack.

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation, with the approval of the Federal Highway Administration, will now proceed with additional steps required for approval of the Manchester Airport Access Road Project, including applying for a State wetlands permit and preparation for a future public meeting.